

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

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The World Socialist Web Site invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature.

South Korea: Samsung Electronics workers to hold first ever strike

The National Samsung Electronics Union (NSEU), representing 28,000 of the company's 125,000 workers, announced on Wednesday that it plans to stage "collective action" to protest stalled wage negotiations. The union said it will begin with a coordinated one-day use of collective leave by members on June 7 as a preliminary step toward a potential general strike.

Negotiations for a pay increase began in January. After nine rounds of failed negotiations, almost three quarters of union members voted for strike action. The NSEU is demanding a 6.5 percent pay increase and a bonus pegged to the company's earnings. Samsung offered only a 5.1 percent wage increase.

The Samsung Group banned unions until 2020 when the company came under intense public scrutiny after its chairman was prosecuted for market manipulation and bribery. The strike would be the first at Samsung since it was founded in 1969. Management said they will continue to negotiate with the union.

India: Tamil Nadu government hospital contract cleaners strike

About 50 employees of cleaning contractor Quality Property Management System at the Udumalai government hospital near Coimbatore walked out on May 25. They alleged that the contractor had not paid their provident fund (PF) of 800 rupees (\$US9.6), which has been deducted from their pay each month for the past two and half years.

Workers said they would not return to work until they knew the status of their PF deductions. They complained that they worked hard during the COVID-19 pandemic, but hospital management and the government had not intervened on their behalf with the contractor.

Tamil Nadu transport workers protest bullying and excessive fines by traffic police

Government bus drivers, auto drivers and other transport workers in Manapparai protested on May 25 over large numbers of arbitrary fines being issued by traffic police. They demanded police end their

unnecessary hostility to government bus drivers.

The protest was called by the All-India Trade Union Congress, Centre for Indian Trade Unions, and Anna Thozhirsanga Peravai.

Tamil Nadu: Chennai Municipal Corporation sanitary workers demand pay increase and permanent jobs

Sanitary workers from the Chennai Municipal Corporation protested on the Basin Bridge, in Chennai on May 22 to demand higher wages and permanent jobs. Workers condemned the corporation, saying that no public toilets in Chennai city are in usable conditions and they were not provided with proper protective equipment to clean them. They complained that wages are paid 18 days late each month. The protest was organised by the Maoist affiliated Left Trade Union Centre.

Andhra Pradesh rural employment program workers protest delayed wages

Workers employed under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA) at Ajayapuram village, Cheemalapadu panchayat, protested on May 24 to demand unpaid wages. Organisers of the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups said the workers had been paid for only four days while they worked for six days in a week.

They said that if outstanding wages were not paid by June 10 their action would be intensified. The workers were forced to depend on the MNREGA because of the failed cashew crop due to pests.

Punjab water supply and sewerage board workers cut water sewerage to protest abuse

Punjab water supply and sewerage board workers in Abohar in Punjab state held a sit-in demonstration inside the Municipal Corporation office complex on May 25 to protest abuse from a local councillor and a resident against a pump operator and another colleague. They cut water supply and sewerage discharge as part of the protest. Drinking water had not been restored by the evening. Workers demanded the accused people apologise or the protest would continue.

The media said that these workers suffer frequent abuse from residents over the poor quality of water supplied by the municipal corporation.

Bans on technology, paperwork and overtime have already been imposed, along with ad hoc stoppages.

Bangladeshi garment workers protest unpaid wages

Garment workers from Mifkif Apparels in Gazipur, in Dhaka, protested on Tuesday morning to demand their unpaid April wages. About 500 workers rallied outside Gazipur City Corporation mayor's residence. They then demonstrated on the Dhaka-Mymensingh highway interrupting traffic for several hours until police intervened.

The protest began after factory authorities failed to pay wages on Monday. In a move to end the protest a factory official pledged to pay due wages within a week.

Sri Lanka: Strike by 12,000 village level service officers enters seventh week

About 12,000 Grama service officers' (representatives of the Sri Lankan village level government) have maintained their sick-leave strike begun on May 6 over several demands. Workers are demanding uniforms, offices and field visit travel allowances.

Rolling stoppages by submarine maintenance workers in South Australia

About 350 trades workers from the government-operated ASC submarine maintenance and sustainment facility at the Osborn Naval Shipyard in Adelaide have been taking one-hour stoppages and rallying outside their workplace each morning since May 6.

The Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU), Australian Workers Union and the Electrical Trades Union have been trying to negotiate a deal with ASC since November for a new work agreement.

The highly skilled workers, who refurbish Australia's Collins Class Submarines, want pay parity with their colleagues in Perth, Western Australia, who do repair and maintenance on the submarines but are paid 17 percent more. ASC has only offered a 6.75 percent pay rise.

The AMWU claimed that ASC CEO Stuart Whiley, who recently received a 31 percent pay increase, has refused to negotiate on pay parity. His pay rise lifted his salary to \$1,084,725 a year.

Kone Elevator electricians in Queensland continue industrial action

Over 40 Electrical Trades Union (ETU) members employed by Kone Elevators on the Star Casino residential tower Epsilon construction site at Broadbeach, southeast Queensland, are holding protest rallies outside the casino as part of a campaign for job security within their subcontractor clause in a new work agreement. An ETU spokesperson said the new clause is needed to protect wages and conditions if workers are forced onto another subcontract.

ETU members stopped work for 24 hours on May 8 after unanimously voting to take industrial action which could include an unlimited number of work stoppages—from one hour to 24 hours—and multiple work bans.

New South Wales community sector workers protest attack on conditions

More than 70 social and community services workers demonstrated outside Australian Industry Group (AIG) offices on May 24 to oppose the big business lobby organisation's attack on long-standing rights and conditions.

AIG is making representation to the Fair Work Commission (FWC) to reclassify paid "sleepovers" for resident care workers. They want businesses to be allowed to roster resident care workers on either side of a sleepover shift, reclassifying the sleepovers as a "break" between shifts. This means workers could lose their penalty rates on these shifts, which be counted as a rest break. Employers could then roster workers for back-to-back shifts without any proper rest.

The Australian Services Union alleged that workers could be facing a period of 30 hours or more away from home, without proper rest breaks or penalty rates. The union stated on its Facebook page that, "Sleepover shifts are work, not breaks. Workers are required to be at work and away from their home."

The union has called the workers and the public in general to sign a petition urging AIG to withdraw its submission to the FWC. No industrial action or further protests have been called.

Western Australian public hospital workers and school special needs educators strike for higher wages

On Wednesday, hundreds of United Workers Union (UWU) and Health Services Union (HSU) members at the Perth Children's Hospital and Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital walked out and protested outside their hospital demanding a wage increase in line with the cost of living. They were joined by other public sector workers. A parallel strike and meetings were held by special needs educators at public schools across Western Australia.

Workers said seven years of poverty wages, due to the state government's sub-inflation pay rise policy imposed on all public sector workers, have left them facing financial disaster, with some at risk of homelessness. Wage rises were capped to just \$1,000 per annum prior to September 2023. The government is offering 3 percent, or \$3,120, plus a cost-of-living bonus of \$3,000 per annum. These concessions fall short of compensating for the previous cap on wage rises.

The HSU and UWU are in a bargaining coalition called the WA Public Sector Alliance which is demanding wage rises of 12 percent over two years. Special needs educators have already rejected two sub-inflation wage rise offers and are threatening to escalate their industrial action if the government fails to meet their wage demand.

Ballarat council workers escalate industrial action for new work agreement

More than 200 Australian Services Union members from the Ballarat

City Council in central Victoria have escalated their three weeks of limited protected industrial action to demand higher wages in a new enterprise agreement. Workers voted unanimously to ban work at the council's premier White Night festival on Saturday where in excess of 40,000 tourists are expected to attend.

Art gallery workers will stop work for 10 minutes each hour on Saturday, before striking for their whole shift on Sunday. Waste collection workers will strike on Monday.

Indoor and outdoor workers voted in April to take action following nine months of failed negotiations. In March they overwhelmingly rejected the council's sub-inflation wage offer and its plans for changes to childcare rosters. The council's 3.5 percent annual pay increases in a three-year agreement are a real pay cut compared to the current 3.8 percent consumer price index rate in Victoria.

Workers want wage parity with Greater Geelong and Greater Bendigo councils who they say get \$4,000 more in wages a year. ASU is demanding a 5 percent pay increase or \$62 (whichever is the greater) from September 2023, 6 percent or \$65 in June 2024 and 6 percent or \$70 in June 2025.

New South Wales patient transfer ambulance officers escalate industrial in pay dispute

Patient Transfer Officers (PTO) employed by Healthshare, a government body providing health services for public hospitals, have escalated industrial action in their wage dispute with the state Labor government. The Ambulance Division Health Services Union (ADHSU) claimed that at three meetings held so far, the government had refused to negotiate on the PTO's log of claims. Their Award is due to expire at the end of June.

In addition to current work bans, which include no single PTOs attending home addresses, no single PTO operations between 6 p.m. and 6 a.m. and no multi-loading of patients, PTOs put bans on discharging patients and updating their job status and bans on calling ahead sending facilities.

Victoria University educators impose work bans for pay increase

National Tertiary Education Union members at the Victoria University, in Melbourne, began industrial action on May 24 in response to "no meaningful progress" in negotiations for a new work agreement.

Academic staff did not attend "Final Friday" meetings and stopped work for two hours at 9 a.m. to attend a stop work meeting at Footscray Park.

Professional staff banned the use of university online systems between 11 a.m. and 12 p.m. and attended an online rally at 12 noon on the same day. From June 3 through to June 7, NTEU members will impose teaching bans and strike for 24 hours on June 5.

New Zealand Blood Service workers strike

New Zealand Blood Service workers began strike action last week impacting elective surgeries in major centres. More than 290 lab workers,

scientists, technicians and administrators voted to stop work on May 31 from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. and for 24 hours on June 4. Strikes are taking place in Auckland, Waikato, Tauranga, Palmerston North, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin.

The Public Service Association (PSA) says the action follows seven months of stalled negotiations to try and achieve pay parity with HealthNZ-Te Whatu Ora.

The workers collect and process blood components used in surgery and with chemotherapy patients. One PSA delegate said they are paid 13-35 percent less than those at HealthNZ for the same work and with the same skills and experience. "People are struggling with their bills now and we just can't keep waiting," he said.

The action also includes a ban on working outside paid hours from May 29 to June 6, ban on processing plasma from May 29 to June 6 and a ban on overtime or extra shifts between June 6 and June 19.

NZ Waikato University staff protest over pay

University of Waikato staff picketed the university's Maori P? last Friday for an improved pay rise, saying what has been offered is below inflation. Up to 110 staff waved placards and flags for three hours during the university's open day and were joined by visiting high school students.

A Tertiary Education Union organiser said eight months of negotiations on pay and conditions were at an impasse. The university was forecasting \$24 million in revenue this year but only offering \$4 million for pay increases, equating to just 2.85 percent. The union has dropped its demand from an 8 percent increase to 5 percent.

New Zealand trainees protest hours of unpaid labour

Trainee teachers, healthcare workers, and social workers protested at the New Zealand parliament on Tuesday demanding payment for job training commitments. About 60 people delivered a petition, signed by more than 16,000, calling for students to receive a fortnightly stipend to cover costs.

Paid Placements Aotearoa campaign lead Bex Howells said she dropped out of social work training because of unpaid placements, saying they were expected to do "thousands of hours of unpaid labour to qualify." Association of Social Workers president Sharon Roberts spoke of "placement poverty," saying there was a drop-out rate of 45 percent among social work trainees.

Medical Students' Association President Indira Fernando said, "We're expected to pay to get ourselves to placement... We pay for food while we are on placement. We pay for rent both at home and on out-of-town placements. And we cannot work." The protesters want funding in this week's government budget for all job trainees.



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